

Black Bass Roundtable (February 18, 2015)  
Minutes from Agenda

There were 19 members of the roundtable. The attending members were: Steve Chaconas (National Bass Guide Service), Scott Sewell (Let's Go Fishin' Guide Service, Conservation Director Maryland Bass Nation), Roger Trageser (President Maryland Bass Nation, Sportfish Commissioner), Jerry Jeranka (American Bass Anglers), Dick Berich (Maryland Bass Nation, Membership Director), Denis Schanberger (Maryland Bass Nation, Secretary), Edna Stetzar (DNREC), Brett Coakley (MDDNR), Adam Eshleman (MDDNR), Charlie Gougeon (MDDNR), Tim Groves (MDDNR), Gina Hunt (MDDNR, Deputy Director of Fisheries), Joe Love (MDDNR), Tom O'Connell (MDDNR, Director of Fisheries), Brian Richardson (MDDNR), Susan Rivers (MDDNR), Mark Staley (MDDNR), Jerry Stivers (MDDNR), Branson Williams (MDDNR).

The 2015 black bass roundtable was called to order at 10:00 am. After some brief announcements, the topics of guiding for largemouth bass and illegal guiding were extensively discussed. Existing infrastructure allows, but does not require, black bass guides in Maryland to participate in a registry, which could serve as an on-line resource for patrons seeking to find a legally licensed guide. This registry does not solve problems that include: 1) not all guides are listed in the registry; 2) making potential or existing guides aware of all of the licenses and certifications that they need; and 3) allowing natural resources police an easy ability to distinguish between licensed and non-licensed guides on the water. To help address this problem, it was suggested to add a question during the process of obtaining a fishing license, "would you like to be included on the charter boat guide list?" This possible solution will be addressed by Gina Hunt. To help make guides aware of the licenses and certifications, it was suggested to: 1) develop a website that clearly illustrates the necessary steps; 2) send an informative annual letter to anyone who has ever applied for a guiding license; 3) write a 1/2 page of information for the 2016 Maryland Fishing Guide. These possible solutions will be worked on by Joe Love, Capt. Scott Sewell, and Capt. Steve Chaconas. Feedback on a drafted website clearly illustrating necessary steps was solicited from Capt. Steve Chaconas, Capt. Scott Sewell, Gina Hunt, and other roundtable members. It was also suggested that guides in Maryland waters obtain an annual boat decal along with their guide license. The decal would provide natural resources police an opportunity to distinguish between licensed and non-licensed guides. This possible solution will be researched by Gina Hunt.

The possible problem with cormorants will be addressed by a subcommittee of Capt. Scott Sewell, Mark Staley, Dick Berich, and Joe Love. Cormorants may cause habitat degradation in some areas because of their production of guano. While existing food habit studies by Roman Jesien and Kelly Bulrys (1994) indicate cormorants do not directly affect sport fishes, there are several states that have control programs aimed at minimizing the local and negative effects of cormorants in some areas. Maryland agencies control cormorant populations when the birds nest near power lines. The subcommittee will identify one or two areas to focus a study and work with MD DNR Wildlife and Heritage to examine the issue further.

Senate Bill 666 was discussed by Gina Hunt to invite discussion with black bass guides on whether the guide license should be valid for a calendar year or match the term consistent with other commercial guide licenses and the proposed term of the charterboat decal (September 1 to August 31 of the following year). Of the guides present 1 preferred the calendar year license and 2 others preferred the Sept 1 – Aug 31 because it will coincide with the term of the charterboat decal. Additional comments may be provided to her at [gina.hunt@maryland.gov](mailto:gina.hunt@maryland.gov).

Fouling of the release site by organic matter at Gunpowder State Park (Dundee Marina) was discussed by anglers and with the Park Manager, Christina McCullough. It was decided that the roundtable would draft a letter (initially drafted by Dick Berich and Joe Love) to request a short-term release site and a long-term solution, such as routine removal of organic material near the new dock (possibly at low tide) and/or extension of the water-intake system pipes for the weigh-in station. The letter should be addressed to Mike Browning.

The stocking strategy for 2015 was agreed upon by roundtable members. Streams that will be stocked include: Fairlee Creek, Worton Creek, Choptank River, Gunpowder River, Patuxent River, and Potomac River. The purpose of stocking Potomac River is to improve recruitment, and grow the population, and for the other rivers, to grow the fisheries.

Information for submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) distribution presented by Joe Love and notes from Lee Karrh (Environmental Program Manager, MD DNR), Chris Snow (Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, MDDNR), and Kriste Garman (Park Manager, Anita C. Leight Estuary Center) indicated struggling SAV in the upper Bay region, but recovering SAV in Potomac River (at least, in some areas). Capt. Steve Chaconas highlighted the differences in Hydrilla and Milfoil, noting the differences in catch of largemouth bass in both types of beds and the differences in their seasonal use by bass. Joe Love noted that he will be working with Danny Ryan and D.C. Fisheries on examining the relationship between different SAV species (Milfoil and Hydrilla) and the distribution of largemouth bass and other fishes.

A meeting will be established in March between Roger Trageser, Dick Berich, Scott Sewell, Joe Love, Brett Coakley and Elk Neck State Park managers to discuss safety improvements to the boat ramp in the park. Joe Love will set up the meeting.

Zebra mussels have been found in greater numbers in the upper Chesapeake Bay. Joe Love noted House Bill 860 which would authorize MD DNR to require decontamination of vessels (removing vegetation, drying live wells) before those vessels entered state-owned impoundments, such as Deep Creek Lake. For more information on zebra mussels, anglers may contact Joe Love. A letter to all tournament directors will, in part, deliver information on zebra mussels and how their anglers can decontaminate their vessels voluntarily before putting their vessel into tidal or non-tidal waters.

A letter from the roundtable will be written to the Base Commander at Quantico to request access to closed areas by anglers and to request locations be verified of buoys that demarcate closed areas. The letter will be drafted initially by Dick Berich and Joe Love. A verification of buoy placement will also be requested of Bob Cantin (Smallwood State Park manager) in March. Joe Love will contact Bob Cantin. Maxwell Point (Gunpowder Proving Grounds) is a location that should be examined for access by anglers. In addition, buoys mark the division line between Dyke Marsh (Potomac River) and Maryland and should be examined for placement accuracy. Joe Love will contact Brent Steury (National Park Service, Dyke Marsh).

Speed limits and no wake zones were discussed in light of safety concerns and minimizing disturbance over bass nests. A safety concern was raised for a narrow section of stream that extends from Mariners Park (on Gunpowder River) to the Quarry pit. A petition was signed to create a "no wake/6 mph limit at all times" and will be sent to Mike Grant (Boat Act Advisory Committee) for consideration. No wake zones have also been established to protect nesting bass. In Marshyhope Creek, a 4.8 km section adjacent to Route 313 bridge was established as a no wake zone between 1 March through 15 June. While available evidence indicates that stream-wide reproduction was neither improved nor harmed by this no wake zone, in other areas a seasonal no wake zone may be more productive. Areas mentioned included Sweden Point and upstream (Mattawoman Creek) and Spoils Cove (Potomac River). These areas constitute both safety concerns for boaters and productive nursery areas for bass. Capt. Steve Chaconas, Denis Schanberger, and Joe Love will work together on developing petitions for those areas. In addition to safety and nesting concerns, there was also concern that the speed limit zones are not clearly marked. In Delaware, start and end signs are used to demarcate the beginning and ending of a speed limit zone. Joe Love will contact Edna Stetzar and Maryland DNR Boating Services to work toward solving this problem.

Freshwater artificial reefs may help attract bass and anglers. Dick Berich discussed using concrete available through MARI to create a small reef in tidal freshwater of Potomac River. Additional reef material donated by Mossy Oak may be available and could be added to lake-like environments, such as Deep Creek Lake. The availability of the donated material will be examined by Dick Berich. Charlie Gougeon will consult with the western region managers and Deep Creek State Park to discuss whether there is general support to add the material to Deep Creek Lake. Dick Berich and Joe Love will discuss locations in the tidal Potomac where a reef may be useful. If the reef is considered a viable option, then they will work with MARI and Erik Zlokovitz (MDDNR) during the permitting process.

Two possible proposals were discussed: 1) catch-and-return areas; and 2) a black bass stamp. Catch-and-return areas may help provide stable fishing in streams during years when there is a high level of tournament activity on the river. They may also help protect offspring by lessening the chance that caught and transported males will abandon their nests during the spawning season. If proposed, catch-and-return areas would need to be monitored for their effectiveness and possibly removed after a time period. The black bass roundtable would serve as infrastructure for assessing the effectiveness of the catch-and-return areas. The criteria used to establish catch-and-return areas could include: 1) limited access by the public (i.e., not many docks); 2) quality reproduction areas; and 3) areas that are easily enforced as catch-and-return areas. Possible suggestions included Lloyd's Creek (Sassafras River), Swan Creek (in upper Bay), and a portion of Furnace Bay (in upper Bay). Existing sanctuaries in Gumtree Cove and Concord Cove occur during spawning season, but are small areas and Gumtree Cove does not offer quality habitat for largemouth bass. Rotating these smaller sanctuaries to catch-and-return areas that were larger and/or in other locations was discussed. Capt. Scott Sewell suggested that we start by choosing one or two locations first. It was decided to conduct a survey and ask anglers about their general sentiment regarding catch-and-return areas for largemouth bass.

A black bass stamp would be a tool for MD DNR to: 1) enumerate black bass anglers; and 2) target black bass anglers with important information related to the fishery. Some of that information includes: 1) details from the black bass roundtable; 2) new rules that affect the fishery; 3) new strategies that are currently being developed by BASS to improve survival of largemouth bass; and 4) important scientific information that leads to better conservation of the resource. Money from the stamp could be used to stock rivers with black bass, conduct surveys for black bass, and provide incentives for the general public to assist in black bass fishery management (such as providing hats for reporting tagged bass). The stamp could also help address a fairness issue that has long been raised by anglers, by asking non-residents to pay a little more than residents in support of the bass fishery. Roger Trageser will work on developing a bill for a private sponsor. The idea may be scoped with the public in advance of next legislative session and feedback from the general public is strongly encouraged. In order to widely encourage feedback, it was discussed if MDDNR would ask whether anglers intend to fish for black bass when they purchase a fishing license in 2015. If anglers intend to fish for black bass, then those anglers may directly receive an email regarding the black bass stamp proposal in order to invite feedback on the proposal.

Capt. Scott Sewell ended the meeting by asking whether MD DNR could transport fish that are released at Anchor Marina to nearby streams in an effort to reduce crowding at the dock by bass. Joe Love noted that for at least 2 decades, black bass specialists within MD DNR have decided that their moving fish by truck or boat to other rivers is costly, may further endanger lives of bass, and could lead to speculation that MD DNR is robbing fish from one stream to release those fish into another. Captain Sewell and Joe Love prioritized these issues and discussed ways to deal with them. Joe Love will work with Brett Coakley and Mary Groves to determine if bass are crowded in the upper Northeast River during the year or if there is sufficient movement out of the river to alleviate crowding. If crowding during the year is a severe problem, then Joe Love will discuss with staff and tournament directors to move fish, on a limited basis, from tournaments held at Anchor Marine and release them at Elk Neck State Park (at the mouth of Elk River and near the Susquehanna Flats).